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Demographic statistics

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, which was prepared in accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2017/228 and past practices, presents activities carried out by the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat in the area of demographic statistics. It provides a summary of the implementation of the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme over the past year, with a focus on the development and promotion of the newly developed guidelines on the use of electronic data collection technologies in population and housing censuses for the current population and housing census round. It provides information on activities relating to the promotion of the revised set of international statistical standards for civil registration and vital statistics and the development of the handbook on the operations and management of civil registration, vital statistics and identity management systems. It also provides information on the collection of demographic statistics through the *Demographic Yearbook* questionnaires and presents a summary overview of an expert group meeting on migration statistics.

The Commission is invited to take note of the report.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report, which was prepared in accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2017/228 and past practices, presents activities carried out by the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat in the area of demographic statistics.

II. 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme

2. The 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme was approved by the Statistical Commission at its forty-sixth session and endorsed by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 2015/10. The Programme serves as recognition that population and housing censuses are among the main sources of data for effective development planning and objective decision-making, especially in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Programme is aimed at ensuring that each Member State conducts a population and housing census at least once during the period 2015–2024 and disseminates the resulting census statistics on population and housing in as comprehensive and holistic manner as possible.

3. In that context, the Statistics Division undertook the process of revising and updating the major international statistical standard for population and housing censuses, the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*, and the third revision of that set of recommendations was adopted by the Statistical Commission at its forty-sixth session.

4. Building on those principles and recommendations, as well as on the revised *Handbook on the Management of Population and Housing Censuses*, the completion of which was reported to the Statistical Commission at its forty-eighth session, the Statistics Division organized and conducted, with the support of the World Bank and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), three workshops on the theme "2020 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses: international standards and contemporary technologies", held in Lusaka in March 2017; in Lagos, Nigeria, in May 2017; and in Dar es Salaam, United Republic of Tanzania, in June 2017, with the participation of English-speaking and Portuguese-speaking African countries.

5. Taking into consideration that the 2020 round of population and housing censuses (2015–2024) will be substantially different in terms of the role of contemporary technologies, primarily the use of tablet computers and self-enumeration using the Internet, the Statistics Division, in close coordination with the regional commissions of the United Nations, undertook the preparation of the *Guidelines on the Use of Electronic Data Collection Technologies in Population and Housing Censuses*, the final draft of which was deliberated and agreed upon at a task force meeting held in Cairo in January 2017. The *Guidelines* are designed as an online, live document that will be updated with national experiences and further elaboration as they become available throughout the 2020 census round. The posting of the *Guidelines* coincides with the forty-ninth session of the Statistical Commission.

6. The Statistics Division, together with UNFPA and the United States Census Bureau, is coordinating activities related to population and housing censuses through the International Committee on Census Coordination, which meets at least twice a year.

7. The Statistics Division will, as in previous rounds, organize workshops to promote the revised principles and recommendations and other methodological materials, targeting all regions. Detailed schedules, subject matter and information on participating countries and partners will be regularly posted on the website of the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme.

III. Implementation of the *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System, Revision 3*

8. On the basis of the *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System, Revision 3*, endorsed by the Statistical Commission at its forty-fifth session, and the proceedings of the expert group meeting held in February 2017 on the management and evaluation of civil registration and vital statistics systems, the Statistics Division completed the revision of the *Handbook on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems: Management, Operation and Maintenance*, as announced to the Commission at its forty-eighth session. Subsequently, the Division designed and conducted regional workshops to introduce and promote the revised set of international standards and the operations of civil registration, vital statistics and identity management systems. The workshops were held in Bogota in October 2017 for South American countries and in Hanoi in November 2017 for South-East and East Asian countries. The workshops introduced a newly developed curriculum intended to provide training to statisticians, civil registrars, public health officers and identity management professionals on the development of a holistic model for ensuring interoperability between the registration of vital events, the production of regular and reliable vital statistics, and identity management systems. The Division will continue to organize workshops to promote the revised principles and recommendations and other methodological materials on the holistic approach to the functioning of civil registration, vital statistics and identity management systems, targeting all regions of the world.

9. The Statistics Division has initiated the preparation of three additional methodological outputs, as follows: (a) the Division is preparing the *Guidelines for Assessing the Quality and Completion of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics*, intended to elaborate on two dimensions of quality — evaluation of quality assurance systems and processes and data quality assessment — including the presentation of national practices in that respect; the *Guidelines* are designed to be an online, live document that will be regularly updated; (b) the current version of the *Handbook on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems: Preparation of a Legal Framework* was issued 20 years ago; consequently, the Division developed an annotated outline of the revised *Handbook* that was presented and discussed at the technical seminar on a legal framework for civil registration, vital statistics and identity management systems, held in Manila in July 2017, with the support of the Asian Development Bank; on the basis of that outline, work on a revised version of the *Handbook* is now under way; and (c) the current version of the *Handbook on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems: Developing Information, Education and Communication* was also issued 20 years ago; consequently, the Division is undertaking its revision, especially taking into consideration contemporary methods and techniques related to communication and education with regard to the necessity of registering vital events.

10. The Division continues to serve as the secretariat for the Global Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Group and maintains the accompanying website, which provides information on the activities of all members of the Group relating to improving civil registration and vital statistics. The Group elaborated on various projects and programmes carried out by members of the group, ensuring a coordinated approach and the use of international standards and recommendations.

IV. Collection of statistics through the *Demographic Yearbook* questionnaires

11. The Statistics Division collects, compiles and disseminates annually official demographic and social statistics for all countries and areas of the world. The data are collected via a set of annual and census questionnaires dispatched to the National Statistical Offices. The data collected refer to population distribution and composition by several characteristics, including the population of cities and urban agglomerations, fertility, mortality, nuptiality, annual migration flows, migrant stock according to the population censuses, household characteristics, housing characteristics, economic characteristics and levels of education. The traditional form of dissemination is the *Demographic Yearbook* collection, published annually since 1948.[1]

12. The following overview represents an update with regard to the paper presented to the Statistical Commission at its forty-eighth session and focuses on the availability of vital statistics collected from the national statistical offices, which is measured as the availability of the main datasets for each vital event published in the *Demographic Yearbook 2016*, the latest published edition.[2] The annex to the present report contains a table presenting the availability of each listed dataset in terms of the number of countries or areas that submitted data published in the *Demographic Yearbook 2016* as a percentage of the total number of countries or areas of the world.

13. Broadly speaking, the availability of a vital statistic is measured as the percentage of the total number of countries or areas of the world submitting relevant data. With respect to the vital statistics presented in the *Demographic Yearbook 2016*, that availability was as follows (in descending order): live births by urban or rural residence, 72 per cent; deaths by urban or rural residence, 70 per cent; live births by age of mother and sex of child, and deaths by age and sex, 64 per cent each; marriages by urban or rural residence, 56 per cent; marriages by age of groom and by age of bride, 46 per cent; infant deaths by urban or rural residence, 53 per cent; infant deaths by age and sex, 46 per cent; divorces by urban or rural residence, 49 per cent; live births by age of father, and late fetal deaths by urban or rural residence, 37 per cent each; legally induced abortions, 26 per cent; and legally induced abortions by age of woman, 21 per cent.

14. As presented in the *Demographic Yearbook 2016*, around three quarters of the total number of countries or areas of the world have submitted to the United Nations overall statistics on total births and deaths. The share steadily decreases, however, with the introduction of additional variables, such as age, and with respect to other units of vital statistics enumeration, such as fetal deaths.

V. Activities related to migration statistics

15. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other recent global policy documents on international migration, including the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, call for timely and fit-for-purpose migration data and

[1] Editions of the *Demographic Yearbook* are available from http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/dyb/dyb2.htm. Demographic data, especially population and housing census data, are incrementally published online to the UNdata portal at http://data.un.org/.

[2] At the time of reporting (November 2017). By the time the present report is submitted to the Statistical Commission in March 2018, the *Demographic Yearbook 2016* will be available.

statistics. In June 2017, the Statistics Division organized and conducted an expert group meeting on improving migration data in the context of the 2030 Agenda, held in New York, and addressed the lack of comprehensive migration statistics. The experts identified the existing gaps in migration statistics and made a number of recommendations on the collection, compilation and dissemination of data and methodological development, coordination and capacity-building for the improvement of international migration statistics.

16. In particular, the experts agreed on taking a step-wise approach in defining migratory status for monitoring the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. As a first step, migratory status could be classified, in accordance with national practices and regardless of legal status, as: (a) native-born and foreign-born persons; and (b) citizens and non-citizens (including stateless persons). Furthermore, countries were invited to disaggregate the data by additional relevant variables in order to produce comprehensive migration statistics. Subject to future technical refinement, the experts also agreed on a subset of Sustainable Development Goal indicators as relevant to migration, to guide priority-setting in developing methodologies for measuring migration-relevant Sustainable Development Goal indicators and in assisting countries in producing data for those indicators. Methodological guidelines were to be developed with respect to how to produce data for migration-relevant Sustainable Development Goal indicators, focusing on data disaggregation.[3]

17. The Statistics Division will also launch the eleventh tranche of the Development Account project entitled "Collection and use of international migration data in the context of the 2030 Agenda", for the period 2018–2021. The project will be led by the Statistics Division, in collaboration with the United Nations Population Division, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The guidelines on the production of migration-relevant Sustainable Development Goal indicators requested by the participants in the expert group meeting described in paragraph 16 above will be one of the major outputs of the project. The project also comprises capacity-building activities for countries in Asia and Latin America in terms of the implementation of the international standards for migration statistics and the production of data for migration-relevant Sustainable Development Goal indicators.

18. The Statistics Division will organize, in collaboration with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, IOM and the United Nations Population Division, the first forum on international migration statistics, to be held in Paris on 15 and 16 January 2018. Mobilizing expertise from a wide range of disciplines, such as political science, economics, demography, development, geospatial science, sociology, statistics and information technology, the forum will be aimed at exploring innovative ways to measure population mobility, generate timely statistics and create synergies between different stakeholders and perspectives, thereby helping to improve the global understanding of the migration phenomenon.

[3] The list of migration-relevant indicators is available from https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/meetings/2017/new-york--egm-migration-data-EGM%20Recommendations_FINAL.pdf.

Annex

Availability of vital statistics

	Number of countries	*Percentage*
Fertility		
Live births by urban or rural residence	172	72
Live births by age of mother and sex of child	153	64
Live births by age of father	87	37
Fetal mortality		
Late fetal deaths by urban or rural residence	89	37
Legally induced abortions	62	26
Legally induced abortions by age of woman	49	21
Infant mortality		
Infant deaths by urban or rural residence	127	53
Infant deaths by age and sex	110	46
General mortality		
Deaths by urban or rural residence	166	70
Deaths by age and sex	152	64
Nuptiality and divorce		
Marriages by urban or rural residence	134	56
Marriages by age of groom and by age of bride	110	46
Divorces by urban or rural residence	116	49

Source: Demographic Yearbook 2016.